

THE BEHAVIOR OF BAKERY CONSUMERS

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the behavior of bakery consumers as well as their purchase decision process. A survey was carried out in two stages. The first was a qualitative approach, based in interview involving 10 proprietors and/or managers of bakeries and 10 consumers based in Belo Horizonte, State of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The second stage consisted of a quantitative and descriptive characterization. A survey was also performed involving 465 bakery consumers. Results show that consumers attend bakeries mostly to buy perishable food or food for immediate consumption. Besides, the consumers demonstrated positive mental associations about bread, bakeries and baked products, including those produced by other companies than bakeries. In addition, consumers are not willing to pay more for baked products than for products from other industries, although they have been showing preference for baked products. This preference was based on the following parameters: a) minimum or basic attributes; b) differentiating attributes for the general public and; c) differentiating attributes for specific publics. Therefore, the work includes various management and academic implications.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The history about bread dates back to ancient Egypt, for over 10,000; where they used to crop grains along the Nile River for bred production. Although such food was used as compensation forms at work, they were found to be basic and showed a social importance (Franklin, 2003). It believes that for around the year 2500 BC, bakers began producing the first fermented breads. However, according to Ramos (2011), the oldest evidence of fermented bread consumption was also found in ancient Egypt and date back to around 3000 BC. In addition, some historians state that the yeast was used for bread-making purposes in the prehistoric period.

Bread production became a profession, and its sale in large scale gave rise to bakeries. Santos (2012) points out that bakeries spread throughout the world in the twelfth century, the occasion on which France became the world center for the manufacture of luxury breads. At the same time, new baking techniques and bakery improvements were studied in Italy. Thus, Italians are found to be responsible for bakery business in Brazil, which established typical bakeries in the nineteenth century; firstly in the State of Minas Gerais, and later throughout the country.

Bakeries have passed through several changes from their appearance to the present. These changes were in terms of physical structure, production systems, kind of

products, service that they provide, and many others. Some of these changes result from a natural response of bakeries when they face demands resulting from transformations occurring in the market. Souki (2003) points out that today's world changes extend to the political, economic, cultural, social and technological spheres, resulting in new market trends, as well as affecting food consumers and their consumption pattern. This author also states that such changes urge organizations to review their structures, operating strategies and management paradigms so that they can continue competitive.

The review for the current state of understanding of bakery consumers behavior shows that there are concerns for academics so far, although the bread is a product consumed for millennia ago. This statement may be evidenced by means of various studies, such as that performed by Li and Wang (2014). These authors performed a case study in Taiwanese bakeries, approaching about the existing links between services quality and consumers behavior. Other example is a survey carried out in Switzerland by Aerni (2011) about attitudes that affect the choice of consumer for breads containing genetically modified components. In Indonesia, Sekarwati (2013) studied the behavior of bread consumer, especially the perceived value and the repurchase behavior. Besides, Anggie and Haryanto (2012)

analyzed the effect of olfactory, approach behavior, and experimental marketing to ward purchase intent also in Indonesia. In addition, Stefan (2012) emphasized the factors that influence the bread buying process concerning the buying behavior in Romania.

In the Brazilian context, there are some examples of newsletters such as that performed by Tavares and Castro (2013), which carried out an analysis about how production strategies are set up at the bakery industry. Besides, Frutuoso et al. (2013, p. 269) performed an exploratory study on innovation as a growth factor for a small bakery company, seeking to identify the major innovations and growth strategies associated with entrepreneurial opportunities.

Therefore, considering the state of understanding of bakery consumers, the present work aims to understand about their behavior, specifically the following:

- To identify the reasons why consumers are led to attend bakeries;
- To check about sources of data used here, and groups that affect the process of choosing bakeries and products that they sell;
- To determine the relevant attributes of consumers during the purchase decision process;
- To ascertain how is the consumers image with regard to bakeries and baked products, including those produced by them as well as those industrialized in other companies;
- To verify preferences of consumer and their willingness to pay more for given bakery goods.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Consumer Behavior and Buying Decision Process

According to Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2013, p. 06), consumer behavior has traditionally been defined as a basket of options consisting of activities by means of which people obtain, consume and offer products and services.

The bakery sector is contained among the largest industries of Brazil, which consist of approximately 63,000 companies that attended about 41.5 million customers in 2014 (ITPC, 2015). This sector consists of bakery industry, as well as bakeries, which are considered to be retail stores particularly for food selling. In addition, the bakery industry environment shows a fierce competition every day, due to the entry of new bakeries and other competitors such as supermarkets, grocery stores, coffee shops,

bars, convenience stores, and many others. The food consumers, however, become more demanding (REZENDE; WILKINSON; REZENDE, 2005; SOUKI, 2003), spurring bakeries to develop a continuous improvement process. Thus, reviews for the current state of understanding of bakery sector has approached about various consumer behavior facets (GRILLO, 2014; JUNG, 2014; LITVINOVA; MOROZOVA; YATSECHKO, 2015; SILVA, et al., 2014; UGURU; NNACHI; NKWAGU, 2015).

Regarding the consumer behavior field of study, researchers such as Bevilacqua (2013); Sata (2013); Moreira, Chauvel and Silva (2013); Silva, Pine and De Muylder (2014); Lima Filho et al. (2014); and Dias et al. (2014), described the model for the purchasing decisions process, outlined in Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2013).

The model developed by Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2013, p. 73), shows that the purchase decision process consists of the following stages: (i) recognition of the need; (ii) information search process; (iii) evaluation of pre-purchase alternatives; (iv) purchase; (v) consumption; (vi) evaluation of post-consumer and disposal stages. Li and Wang (2014) researched about the buying decision process in bakeries that adopted this model, and they also found that consumers goes typically through these stages, although they are affected by environmental factors (culture, social class, reference groups, etc.) and individual factors (beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, etc.).

Fagundes et al. (2012), Santos et al. (2013), Medeiros, Nogami and Vieira (2013), Moraes and Mattar (2014), and Aragon et al. (2014) point out about the existence of five roles played by individuals during the purchase decision process. In the same sense, Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2013) highlighted that the initiator is the person who suggests the buying of a product or service, and gathers information that help in the decision making process. The influencer is the person whose views influence the decision making process. The decision-maker is who decides what, how and where to buy a given product or service. The buyer is who makes the purchase, and the user is the person who uses or consumes the product or service.

The first stage of the purchase decision process is, according to Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2013, p. 74), the **need recognition**, which “occurs when the individual feels the difference between what he or she perceives to be the ideal versus the current state of things.”

According to Sheth, Mittal and Newman (2001), the identification of the need may arise from internal or external stimuli. The internal stimuli start with the

perception of the discomfort of physical and/or psychological nature, which becomes impulses. The external stimuli are impulses caused by external agents, revealing a need that was not previously perceived. These authors also describe that external stimuli are usually caused by market actors such as advertisements, advertising or influential groups that are found along with the individual such as neighbors, co-workers or family members. For baked goods containing conventional, organic and/or genetically modified components, Aerni (2011) shows the influence of the public opinion, media and social groups in the buying process and consumer willingness to pay.

Giraldi and Tagnin (2013), and Alves, La Falce and De Muylder (2013) well describe the importance of these stimuli, which is the trigger for all other stages in the on-screen model for the purchase decision process.

The second stage is known as for **information search**. In this stage, the consumer can perform searches on his memory (internal search) or external sources of information (external search). The internal search occurs when consumers demand information on their prior knowledge about products, services, companies, brands or businesses acquired over time, including the buying and consumption past experience. The external search is characterized by information found from the search carried out in various sources such as radio, newspapers, magazines, television, Internet, billboards, and many others. In addition, sources for the external search also consists of relatives, friends, co-workers, experts and other opinion-forming groups able to influence consumers decisions (BLACKWELL; MINIARD; ENGEL, 2013).

The third step in the buying decision process is called **evaluation of alternatives**. Souki et al. (2010), Kalil and Gonçalves Filho (2012), Lobler, Kings and Bolzan (2014) state that this stage attracts attention of researchers to develop their work on the purchase decision process. However, Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2013) point out that the value and past experiences influence the choice of consumers. Therefore, evaluations obtained from the memory or new reviews, based on information obtained by means of internal or external search, help in the consumers choice process.

Regarding the competition strategy at the baked goods market, Tavares and Castro (2013) highlight the important of the perception of buyers about a given product, for example about its price, quality and services provided.

At this stage, images and mental associations are used by consumers to affect the choice process of products, whereas the quality and value are crucial in their

purchasing options (RECHE et al., 2013). Grasseli and Souki (2007) recognized the existence of diverse perspectives, under which the subject image can be treated. However, they were based on the definition of image that refers to associations occurring in the human mind when thinking about a certain word or specific topics. Brito et al. (2011); Silva, Merlo and Nagano (2012); Milan et al. (2013); Reche et al. (2013); Miranda et al. (2014) and Zhang et al. (2015) well approached about this perspective of image. Thus, it found that, as the image consists of personal references and these references differ from person to person, an individual who has lived an experience or received a given information about a subject; he can have an image different of that a person who has lived other experiences and accessed distinct information has.

In the **stage of purchase**, among other related decisions, consumers decide what, when and where to buy, as well as how to pay for it (Blackwell, Miniard and Engel, 2013). Other aspect related to this stage is to evaluate whether there was a total planning before making a purchase, a partial or no planning, ie, if the purchase was made on impulse or not. Torres and Penagos (2013), also used the model outlined in Blackwell, Miniard and Engel to emphasize the aspects related to this stage, seeking to characterize buyers found in supermarkets and hypermarkets of Colombia.

In the **consumption stage**, marketing professionals and companies look for the understanding of behavior objectives, final consumer and envision future growth opportunities about the location and form by mean of which a given product was obtained, as well as the quantity that was consumed (BLACKWELL; MINIARD; ENGEL, 2013).

In the **post-purchase evaluation** stage, the consumer defines when, where and how will consume a given product, as well as the relating quantity. At this stage, the consumer experiences a feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, as it precedes the consumption and experimentation of the product or service purchased (BLACKWELL; MINIARD; ENGEL, 2013). After consumption, the person evaluates the product or service purchased. This step of the buying process has already been investigated (Henderson and Lyons, 2013); Basso et al., 2013).

Disposal is the seventh and final stage of the buying decision process. Opinions of consumers about this stage differ one another, and include the total or partial disposal, recycling and further resale. For some types of products, parts of products such as packages, guides and manuals can be discarded at the expense of the product as a whole (BLACKWELL; MINIARD; ENGEL, 2013).

2.2 Willingness To Pay

The concept of Willingness to Pay (WTP) refers to the maximum amount of products, services, professionals, and others that consumers claim to be willing to pay for (MOULD QUEVEDO, et al., 2009). This maximum payable amount may be influenced by the culture and the needs, physiological as well as a psychological welfare of consumers in obtaining and consuming a given product. Demand for certain products also influences the maximum amount that consumers are willing to pay for them.

The WTP is a subject well approached for the current state of knowledge. Husted et al. (2014), for example, performed a study about environmental attitudes and willingness to pay for environmental certification in Mexico. Vock (2013) discussed about the willingness to pay for social networking websites. Giraud (2012) developed a structure that allows us to describe the relation between the main concepts and the gap on the Willingness to Accept (WTA) and the willingness to pay (WTP).

The term WTP has also been studied in the food sector, in the project developed by Mamatha and Reddy (2013), for example, which approaches about the impact of organic coffee production in the environmental variable and the willingness of consumers to pay for this kind of products.

3 METHODOLOGY

The present work was performed seeking to understand the behavior of bakery consumers in Belo Horizonte, State of Minas Gerais, Brazil. A survey was carried out in two stages. The first was a qualitative approach, and the second was a quantitative and descriptive assessment. In the first stage, 10 in-depth interviews were carried out for proprietors and/or managers of bakeries selected for convenience and accessibility. Besides, other 10 interviews were carried out for final consumers. Semi-structured questionnaires specifically designed for each group of respondents were used for the interviews, and all involved were interviewed, each for 30-40 minutes.

Questionnaires for the qualitative assessment consisted of questions based on the concepts related to each stage of the purchase decision process proposed by Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2013); and they are as follows:

- What is the ideal location for a bakery in your opinion, and why?
- Which reasons lead you to attend to bakeries?
- What types of baked products are you used buy?

– What leads you to decide about the bakery from which you have to buy baked products?

– Who gives you information about baked products you decide to buy (e.g. spouse, relative, friend, colleague...)?

– Which products must be offered in a bakery to attract much more customers?

– Are there differences between baked products and those industrialized in other companies? Why do you think so?

– What do you think about baked products? Should they be less expensive, equal price, or more expensive than those processed by other companies? Why?

The output obtained from data analysis of qualitative input data was categorized according to stages of the buying decision process and, then, used to make inferences. Results obtained here, associated with other variables described in AERNI (2011); LI; WANG (2014); SATA (2013); SEKARWAT (2013); SOUKI (2003) and STEFAN (2012), showed a set of parameters that guided the designing of the questionnaire for the quantitative stage. A team previously trained about all details related to the survey collected data. Consumers involved in the study were invited on time after they buy baked products in bakeries located in the region under study.

The questionnaire consisted of the following questions: a) which reasons led you to attend to bakeries?; b) which sources of information do you use, and which groups influence the process of choosing bakeries and products in the buying process?; c) which attributes do you consider during the purchase decision process?; d) which image do you have with regard to bakeries and products from the bakery industry?; e) Are you willing to pay more for baked products than for those produced in other industries?

The sample estimate was obtained based on the database provided by the Baking Industry Association of the State of Minas Gerais (Amipão), which involves 1,129 bakeries distributed in nine administrative regions of the capital city of the State. These bakeries were classified according to their location as follows: Venda Nova, North, Northeast, Pampulha, Northwest, East, Central South, West and Barreiro. Then, 45 establishments were selected by convenience, ie, five bakeries per administrative region. From these, 11 interveniens were interviewed per establishment after the purchase process. In the end of the interview process, 30

questionnaires were rejected because they were found to have missing and/or incorrect data, remaining 465 well-filled questionnaires.

The quantitative and descriptive methods were used because they allowed us to find out how often a given phenomenon occurs with the best precision as possible, as well as about its relation and connection with others, its nature and characteristics, and correlating facts or phenomena without being manipulated (Hart, Bervian and Silva, 2007, p.49). This principle is according to that outlined in Malhotra (2001), which states that the objective of a descriptive method is to understand and interpret the reality by means of observation, description, classification and interpretation of phenomena, without interfering to modify them.

To achieve the objectives proposed in this study, statistical data analyses were carried out seeking to assess about the images of consumers with regard to bakeries and baked goods. Besides, they were also asked about the existing mental association between bakery and their relative conception.

Variables analyzed in the qualitative phase were measured seeking to infer about the main reasons that lead consumers to choose a given bakery. The scale for these parameters ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree".

When studying about what leads consumers to decide about the bakery from which they have to buy baked products, various sources were pointed out, from which we highlight the following: bakery, flyers or brochures, billboards, bus ads, radio, television, newspapers, magazines and internet databases. Some questions were proposed seeking to identify the influential groups in the products purchase process.

In addition, several variables were also established aiming to carry out a comparative analysis about the characterization of baked products or those produced by other industries. The scale also ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 means "very bad" and 5 means "very good".

Regarding the evaluation of consumer preferences for baked products or those manufactured in other companies, many answers were found to express a certain preference, each based in a given logic of events. In the end, 32 variables from the qualitative phase were assessed aiming to study attributes considered important by consumers of baked products in the purchase decision process. The scale consisted of five points, where 1 means "very low importance" and 5 means "very high importance".

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the behavior of bakery consumers as well as their purchase decision process. Results show that the gender of respondents is about 49% for male and 51% for female. With regard to the age, it was found that 6.3% of them range from 15 to 19 years old; 38.9% range from 20 to 34 years old; 32.9% range from 35 to 49 years old; 14.6% range from 50 to 65 years old; 5.4% are over 65 years old; and 1.9% did not provide any information about their age.

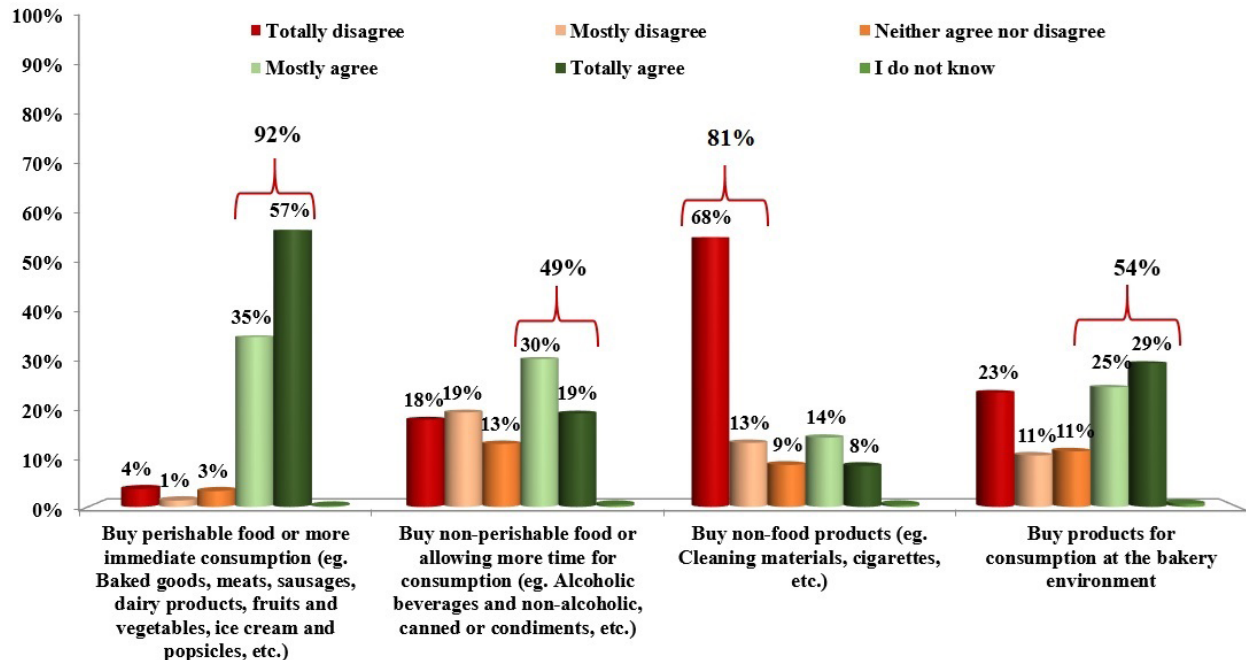
Regarding the education, it was found that the questionnaire respondents have, in general, a low education level. About 4.5% of them completed the 4th grade and 16.1% completed the elementary education (9th grade). The majority of them (54.6%) did the high education. Beyond these, 20.6% are those who are attending the college or who have already completed this education level. In addition, about 3.3% of them completed the postgraduate level (specialization, Master or PhD), and only 0.9% did not answer the questionnaire

In the case of marital status, it was found that 49.1% of bakery consumers are married, 39.6% are single, 7.7% are divorced, 1.9% are widow, and 1.7% did not provide the proper answer.

With regard to family income, 49.6% of bakery consumers gain more less R\$ 4,000.00; 42.4% record income from R\$ 4,000.00 to R\$ 8,000.00; 5.2% record income over R\$ 8,000.00; and 2.8% did not provide any answer.

4.1 Reasons that Lead Consumers to Attend Bakeries

The first objective of this study was to identify reasons that lead consumers to attend bakeries. Results show that 83.4% of bakery consumers realize by themselves the need to buy at a given bakery, and reasons for the visits (Figure 1). This figure shows that 92% of consumers tend to agree that they go to a bakery to buy perishable or immediate food for consumption. In addition, 49% of them tend to agree that they go to a bakery to buy non-perishable food such as beverages, canned food and condiments. It was also found that 54% of them tend to agree that they go to a bakery to buy products that will be immediately consumed in the bakery establishment. About 22% of them agree that they go to a bakery to buy non-food products such as cleaning supplies, utensils for parties and cigarettes. A similar situation was found in Stefan (2012), which states that bread (food for immediate consumption) is the most important baked product searched during the buying process in Romania.



PICTURE 1 – Reasons that lead consumers to attend bakeries

Source: Research data

4.2 Sources of Information and Groups that Influence the Choosing Process of Bakeries and Baked Products

The second objective of this study was to verify the sources of information used by bakery consumers and groups that influence the process of choosing bakeries and baked products.

Results show that respondents tend to have autonomy regarding the choice of the bakery they purchase products. About 84.1% of them claims that they seek information about baked products in respective bakeries, it means, consumers choose bakeries located in places close to ways they used to go through them. Other sources of information about baked products, reported by less than 3% of bakery consumers, are pamphlets or brochures, newspapers, television, bakery website, radio, e-mails, billboards, bus ads, magazine and social networks.

Consumers are also found to have considerable autonomy on the purchasing decision of baked products. Thus, 81.7% of them seek information about the type of products to buy, 85.4% indicate different options of bakeries, 86.7% evaluate different available alternatives of bakeries, 86.5% decide about bakeries in which they buy baked products, 93.1% visit the

bakery to make the purchase decision, and 96.6% consume baked products.

However, other family members, especially spouses, influence the selection process of baked goods as well as the purchasing decision. It was found that, for various steps mentioned above, from 30.8% to 39.4% of respondents are influenced by their respective spouses. Products they purchase are consumed in a shared manner with spouses in about 46.7% of cases, and about 71.0% of cases are related to those consumers influenced by other relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and many others.

Statistically significant differences between women and men were found at 5% of probability. About 85.1% of women seek information about products to purchase and 89.9% of them also indicate options of preferred bakeries; while only 78.5% of men seek information about products to purchase and 81.9% of them also indicate options of bakeries of preference.

4.3 Attributes Considered During the Purchase Decision Process

The third objective of this study was to describe attributes related to the purchase decision process of baked products.

Results show that the location of bakeries is an essential aspect for consumers in the purchase decision process, because establishes the distance from consumers' home to the bakery. Thus, 76.8% of consumers prefer to buy baked products at bakeries near their homes, and 12.0% prefer to buy them at bakeries near their workplaces. In addition, 11.0% of them use to buy them at bakeries located along the way they used to go through. Only 0.2% of them did not provide any answer. The mean distance from consumers' home to the closest bakery they go often is about 2.46 kilometers.

Other potentially influential attributes for the purchasing decision were analyzed and grouped into three categories as follows: a) Minimum or basic attributes; b) Differentiating attributes for the general public; and c) Differentiating attributes for specific audiences. The classification criterion was based on the average, and standard deviations for each parameter estimated, from which the average was found to be good estimate for the analysis

Items belonging to the category of minimum or basic attributes were those considered indispensable by consumers during their purchase decision process of baked products. Without such attributes, bakeries would probably have low client attraction capacity.

Regarding the minimum or basic attributes, the following mean estimates were found for each requirement: (i) 4.67 for 'offer of fresh products'; (ii) 4.65 for 'offer of tasty and delicious products'; (iii) 4.63 for 'quality of services'; (iv) 4.62 for 'honesty in customers service'; (v) 4.58 for 'good looking products'; and (vi) 4.57 for 'high quality products'.

In relation to differentiating attributes for the general public, respondents rated differential aspects, which would serve to attract customers in general. These attributes aggregate value for a not particular audience. These data showed a record of an equal mean estimate about 4.38 for both of the following attributes: "excellent infrastructure" and "low price"; as well as an equal average estimate about 4.35 for the following attributes: "good location" and "wide variety of baked products".

Regarding the "differentiating attributes for specific audiences", attributes considered important for consumers seeking for specific characteristics were found. Thus, the following averages were estimated: (i) 4.40 for "details about the nutritional composition of baked products"; (ii) 4.35 for "offer of products within packages just to deal with people living alone as well as large families; and (iii) 4.32 for "offer of products targeted to specific audiences (eg. diet, light, gluten free, etc.)". The same mean estimate

about 4.27 was found for both of the following attributes: "coffee shop and/or restaurant infrastructures" and "whole grain and/or functional food (eg. whole wheat breads and cakes, multigrain food etc.).

Regarding the importance of these attributes in the purchase decision process, these results are found to be similar to those obtained in Aerni (2011), Li and Wang (2014), Sata (2013) and Stefan (2012) although different categorizing criteria were used.

4.4 Mental Images and Associations that Consumers Have With Regard to Bakeries and Baked Products

The fourth objective of the work was to study about the image consumers have with regard to bakeries and baked products, including those produced by other companies than bakeries.

Grasseli and Souki (2007), and Souki, Amorim and Mendes (2008) state that images have functional, cognitive, symbolic and emotional dimensions, which can greatly influence consumer decisions; the reason why these dimensions were used to classify spontaneous words expressed by baked products consumers.

When consumers were asked about the first word related to baked products that came into their minds, 77.8% of them remembered the word bread. Other complementary products such as coffee, milk, butter, cheese, snacks, cookies, salami, among others, were remembered by 6.3% of respondents as the first mental association they have made. The remaining 15.9% of them showed diffuse mental associations.

It is also found that words pointed out by consumers may have positive, neutral or negative mental associations. Positive images were also emphasized by Silva, Merlo and Nagano (2012), reinforcing the importance they have in the purchase decision process. Positive mental associations were made in 93.3% of cases for the case of words recalled 'bakery'. Negative associations were mentioned by only 1.5% of interviewers, and neutral associations were by 5.2% of respondents. Therefore, It appears that mental associations of consumers with regard to bakeries are quite favorable, whereas the most remembered words shows a positive vector.

The image about baked goods produced and sold by bakeries was also assessed. About 90.8% of the consumers revealed positive mental associations. Negative associations represented only 1.5% of them, and neutral associations were revealed by 7.7% of consumers. For products that are produced and marketed by bakeries, 38.9% of respondents described various types of bread

such as French bread, sweet bread, small roll, etc. Cakes and pies were reminded by 21.1% of consumers; the cheese bread was remembered by 6.4% of respondents; crackers and snack foods were mentioned by 5.3% and 5.1% of them, respectively. The remaining 23.2% consist of other more diffuse mental associations, which did not individually reach 3%.

Regarding the industrial baked products from other companies but sold in bakeries, the sliced bread was the first image that came into their minds in 33.8% of cases. For about 23.8% of respondents, other types of breads were found to be the most immediate mental association. Biscuits, cheese bread and cakes were also mentioned, respectively in 14.5%, 7.1% and 10.1% of cases. About 10.7% of respondents did not make any association with regard to industrialized baked goods from other companies, but sold in bakeries. About 79.4% of cases consisted of positive mental associations made in relation to manufactured products from other companies, but sold in bakeries. Besides, 3.9% of them approached negative associations, and 16.7% mentioned neutral associations.

4.5 Consumer Preferences and Willingness to Pay

The last objective proposed in this study was to describe consumer preferences as well as their willingness to pay more for goods produced by bakeries than for those from other industries.

This goal also refers to the concept of Willingness to Pay (WTP), i.e, it makes reference to the maximum amount that consumers are willing to pay for baked products. Consumers usually pay for products for which they believe the price is within an acceptable range, given the quality. The increase of price of the primary necessity products and other relatively less expensive, such as baked goods, is easily perceived, the reason why it keeps within an acceptable price range in the perspective of consumers.

With regards to consumer preferences, the following results were found: (i) 64.7% of respondents prefer to buy products produced and sold in bakeries than those from other companies but sold in bakeries, although there is no differences in terms of characteristics and price; (ii) 22.2% of respondents did not make distinction between products; (iii) 11.4% of consumers prefer products from other industries than those from bakeries; and (iv) 1.7% did not provide any answer.

Although we identified the existence of a greater consumer preference for products from bakeries, data analysis shows that bakery consumers are not willing to pay more for these products (Willingness to pay) than for

products from other industries. About 47.5% of them are willing to pay a lower price for products from bakeries than for those from other industries, 38.3% of them are willing to pay the same price, 11.4% are willing to pay a higher price for products from bakeries, and 2.8% did not provide any answer.

In regard to goods from bakeries, consumers revealed the same preference, with no tendency to pay a higher price for them, it means, products from bakeries are only selected when the price range is within that for products from other companies. This is according to Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2013, p. 118) description, which states that a high price may avoid the consideration of the product for many consumers.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Bakeries are innovating and adapting their production process and trade every year by diversification of products and services to meet the customers wishes. With a rich history that spans centuries of existence, bakeries attract consumers of different ages, genders, social classes and cultures so far. The existing competition in the bakery market, along with society's demands for healthy and varied food, increases the importance of understanding consumer behavior and their purchasing decision process at bakeries, being such understanding important to promote the perception of trends and opportunities for the bakery sector.

Results obtained in this study support the conclusion that reasons that encourage consumers to attend bakeries are mainly to buy perishable or for immediate consumption food. However, it is also found that the purchase of non-perishable food or food which can be consumed in a longer period, as well as buying products for immediate consumption can motivate consumers to go often to this kind of establishments.

With regard to different roles of these participants in the buying decision process in bakeries, there was a convergence with the five roles outlined in Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2013). However, bakery consumers are influenced by their spouses and by several people, among which are listed other relatives, friends and co-workers. In addition, there was a predominance of women in compliance with various stages of the purchasing decision process.

In relation to mental associations that consumers make with regard to bakeries, results show that such associations are predominantly positive, and essentially related to bread. In fact, associations related to products

from bakeries are predominantly related to the following products: bread, cakes, pies, cheese bread, cookies and pastries. Besides, associations concerning to products from other companies but sold in bakeries, are related to the following products: bread, other types of bread, cookies, cakes and cheese bread. In general, consumers perceive few differences between products produced and marketed in bakeries and those from other companies and sold in bakeries. This found is according to that described in Reche et al. (2013), which states that the perception of quality and value by consumers affects their purchase choices.

These results also allow us to conclude that among attributes considered by consumers in their buying decision, some of them may be described as basic or minimum, also considered mandatory for bakeries, in order to keep competing in the market. Besides, some attributes were identified. These can be used to differentiate bakeries from their competitors, offering features valued by the general public (eg. infrastructure, location, variety of products, market reputation, parking space availability, etc.) or to meet specific market niches (e.g. availability of whole grain and/or functional products, offer of products in various size packages, offer of products targeted to specific audiences such as diet, light, gluten free, and many others).

Although consumers have shown preference for products from bakeries rather than for products industrialized in other companies, they have not shown willingness to pay higher prices for those products. Thus, this study lead us to conclude that bakeries should differ with regard to industries, manufacturing a variety of products, always offering fresh and healthy products, providing extra services and a differentiated services to the customers. The preference for goods from bakeries in comparison to those from other industries can be considered a competitive advantage, although it is not generating a greater willingness of consumers to pay an extra value under comparable quality conditions.

6 ACADEMIC AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study expands the academic knowledge about the behavior of food consumers, especially bread, using a theoretical model academically recognized worldwide. It also allows us to compare results obtained here with those obtained in different realities and markets such as Taiwan, Switzerland, Indonesia and Romania. Such comparisons make possible to describe the importance of the attribute “service quality”, which was equally assessed in Taiwan, Indonesia and Romania. Regarding the

Willingness to Pay, results show that consumers exhibit the preference to pay lower prices for baked goods than for other alternatives; what was also found in AERNI (2011).

Managerial implications provide indications for bakeries about their image in the perspective of consumers, and the way how they face baked products. In addition, they show the image of the main competitors for some products, namely, those manufactured in other industries but marketed in bakeries.

This study also revealed that bakery consumers are not willing to pay more for products from bakeries, although show tendency to prefer these products than those from other industries. Thus, the greater preference for goods from bakeries can be considered a competitive advantage for bakeries.

Therefore, bakeries adapt their strategies to the new trends of baked food consumers, which demand for convenience, service agility and healthy food.

7 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCHES

The authors acknowledge that this research has several limitations. The first is related to data collection, which occurred only once. Considering various factors that can affect the purchasing decisions of bakery consumers, information obtained in this study may change along time. In addition, only the city of Belo Horizonte was included in the study, suggesting the existence of possible influences of culture and local specificities. The survey was performed in all nine administrative regions of the capital city of the State, constituting a non random sampling, but convenience sampling, instead.

Suggestions for further researches may include comparison of different bakery consumers in terms of purchase and behavior in different scenarios. We also encourage future researchers to target specific groups according to their behavioral pattern during the buying and consumption processes. Thus, the following aspects should be considered as essential: type of products, days and purchasing schedules, forms of consumption, participants in the purchase decision process, person who consumes baked products and locations, other products consumed along with baked products, among many others.

To compare the purchasing and consumption behavior of different populations, one can expand the geographical scope of the research, including other cities, regions and countries, because may show different behavioral patterns.

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